tempter and lamb

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tempter and lamb

by antiheroblake

Summary

sick with fever, will makes his way out of his house, called into the wilderness by the spirit, and is met with a darkness that threatens to swallow him whole

Notes

biblical references from matthew 4: 1-11 *his temptation* and revelation 17: 3-6 *visions of doom*. there are also very light references to genesis 3 *the fall.*

thank you @tattlecrime_ for this idea !!!

See the end of the work for more notes

He's sinking down, his mind falling into the flatness of desert expanse, mouth and soul parched from the coldness. The dark of night surrounds him like that of the enemy, coming to touch the softest bits of him, to taint him. There are cracks in his skull, and he can feel the darkness seeping in. All of his attempts, all of his need to be good, are coming to an end. That's what the darkness whispers, disembodied voices calling him, torturing him, demanding things of him. He rips at his hair, nails cutting into the thin skin of his scalp. Another voice calls to him, soft and feminine. It demands as well, more than the whispers do. He has not known the voice of God in his life, not even as a child who cried to him for mercy, but the voice that calls to him feels like the Spirit his peers once described.

It drowns out the darkness, silences his cracked mind. If only just for now, if only to draw him in.

That child in him wants to search. It rattles in him like a hornet nest; agitated. The voice does not soothe that agitation, but it does make strife bloom in the deepest parts of him like the cold of winter. Not strife for those voices it has silenced, but strife for what's to come.

There is something in the woods.

He stumbles through the woods so far from his house, hands catching on the brittle bark of dissolving trees, the soft soles of his worn boots slipping over the wet, decomposing blanket of leaves that litter the forest floor. The scent of mold envelopes him, rotting trees crumbling around his feet from a storm so long ago. If he listens, he thinks he could hear the termites and beetles that have made their homes in the hollow, wet trees. The hornet nest in him; he cannot place its wanting; rattles louder.

The voice, the Spirit, calls to him. Beckoning him to come closer, to come into the wilderness, to know it as he has known the Father. (He has never known the Father. He has been abandoned by him, like any unwanted child.) The cold night envelopes him, the hands of something unfathomable, of something divine, pulls him further down. Crushing him under the weight of himself, the sky, and the taste of corrosion.

His skipping mind, blinded and dark, cannot decide if the divine is Holy or blasphemous. He wonders, as he slips and catches himself on the first solid tree, if there isn't a way that it can be both? The sound of a preacher's holler tells him otherwise, but he doesn't know if there's any trust for a man bought and sold by the stifling hatred of Southern wretched heat.

As a small boy, he had known he was Holy and blasphemous, and if it lives in him, if the river, blessed by the hands of more righteous men, could not wash him clean, then was there anything to clean? They couldn't drown that hornet nest. They could not drown what was born in him, placed within his mother's womb, knitted together like the Christ had been. He had prayed (God never loved him; Will has never been more than a sacrifice) that it would go, that he'd cough up the insects and the wasp spit until he was free of it.

Had God not crafted him? Made him in his own image? God must have a hornet nest in him as well. It must make him jealous, it must make him punish.

In a small clearing with murky rays of moonlight beaming through, he sees a man shrouded in inky darkness. He sits at a table, a feast presented before him, and only silence engulfs between them. The Spirit, the voice, whatever it is, tells him to go forward. It has guided him here, presented this man before him and he knows this is a test. The Spirit wouldn't come to him for anything more.

The preacher at his childhood Pentecostal church used to cry out about times like this. When man would be tested by a great fiend, and how he, as mere flesh and blood, would surely fall short of God–except he wouldn't. He could not. If he, Holy and blasphemous, son of man that he is, fell to temptation then he'd be no better than the men he catches, no better than the man the preacher said he'd be.

Will's lived with his hornet nest. At times, he's even tamed the thing. No other man he knows would so willingly shut away the worst of himself and press it into the hollow parts of his chest. No preacher could be right about him. Whether religious or otherwise. He would not give them the satisfaction. His hornet nest, wanting and grotesque as it may be, did not decide for him.

He breathes in, the scent of moist dirt and rotted wood fills his nose. The man's eyes shine ruby in the rays of moonlight; he finally sees him. Even in the darkness he can see the deep scarlet color of his suit, pearlescent buttons and cufflinks holding it all together, wrapped up like a gift for his enjoyment. To his right, at this cursed feast sits a beast, the beast of his dreams. Dark and feathered with horns that reach up into the black night, and the skewed face of a man. It watches him as the man, this forest lurker, pours thick liquid into a golden cup.

"Come sit," The man says, gesturing toward the feast. There is a seat to his left, the only other chair at the entire table. "I've saved you a place."

Will blinks confusedly. The voice comes out warped, echoing around his head. He can't tell if he truly heard it or if it's something he's concocted. The hornet nest buzzes louder, rattling his bones. What it says to him, he can't quite know nor is he willing to ask – not that this thing in him would answer.

As he steps closer, purple colored shadows dancing around him, he recognizes the man. Strong and poised, hands cutting thick slices of roasted meat and placing them onto an ivory plate. This is something he has avoided so many times, and yet the Spirit has demanded he come.

"Doctor Lecter?" He asks. His throat dries once again and the words come out choked. He can't understand why he's out here, but he doesn't want to question such a thing either. It isn't in his nature. Neither of them have done things without thinking. They are ever so calculated.

He pauses his cutting to drink from his cup, petulant and full. His maroon eyes glint as he looks up at him. If his chest could collapse it would, but the hornet nest keeps it full and expanding. "Hello, Will."

Has he waited for him this long? He and his beast? Did the preacher, the man who hollered and cried in the hot Louisiana summers know this would happen? Had the Spirit? The

voices? He's a strong man, he insists, but there is nothing blue on his door and he worries his chest is open for the Hag–but it's just him and Hannibal. There's nothing here. Just the two and the beast.

The Spirit comes upon him like a weight, it beckons him forward, it begs him not to go. The hypocrisy of it confuses him, like everything else out here, but he trusts Hannibal, he has trusted Hannibal more than any other. Yet this is some sort of test, he's meant to be strong, and his mind is too fragile to try and understand that. All he knows is, with all his trust, he cannot stumble. And if for some reason, Hannibal is here to cause his fall, he worries he may allow it.

Men stumble. They always have. They always will. His father did, his preacher, even Jack Crawford. Men like that have room for faults. Men like that are so easily forgiven. If Will stumbles, he thinks it could be the end of him. Of the him that he has known, has stitched up with thin red thread. A stumble now would be his very undoing and Hannibal Lecter is the perfect stumbling block.

He walks slowly to the table. The mud is thicker here, and his untied boots suck into the ground with every cautious step. Across the large dark wooden table sits more food than any two people could possibly eat. Roasted, fried, and seared meats. Steamed vegetables with cold butter. Spongy cakes with thick jams and jellies. Flaky pastries drizzled with cream. Fruits of unknown origin, pierced with knives and bleeding across the table with thin juice.

The dryness in his throat crackles. He could swallow down the juice, lap it up like dogs. (He's good for it. He knows how dogs drink.) But he tears his eyes away from the table and stares back at Hannibal. His trusted friend, his most important advisor. Is he meant to be the fiend the Bible so desperately warns against?

Very slowly, he sits. The chair is soft and molds to his body. He's far too close to him, but he realizes that too late. Whatever this is, whatever Hannibal has planned for him, he knows it's too late to turn away now.

At a closer glance, the food seems to writhe. Breathing, pulsating. It doesn't turn his stomach like it should, no, it insights something's animal within him. His teeth suddenly feel misplaced and his jaw unaligned. His desire to bite into something is heavy and hit saliva fills his mouth until his tongue feels light.

"What is this?" He asks, slurred with the amount of spit he can't swallow down.

There's something. He can't name it–he's finding he can't name a lot of things these days. Hannibal is becoming. He doesn't know what or why, but he is, and he can't place if he should be frightening by this fact or comforted.

(He's more frightened that they're in the woods so late at night. Hannibal is hardly a frightening thing, even as this table, even with his beast. The familiarity can't bring out horror – maybe that's the problem.)

"I love to host," Hannibal says, like he should have simply known that. Of course, he does know that, but here of all places? An entire feast? He could've at least made a fire. "You

rarely let me host, tonight I do so in your honor."

"It's late, why–my *honor*?" He swallows, his throat still dry. He tries to swallow again and again, but it scratches like thorns, like stingers. Nothing goes down but the dry winter air. "I'm confused."

"You have been confused, haven't you?" His voice echoes strangely. Whistling through the trees but bounces between his ears. "I want to offer you something. Something you can't yet ignore. Then, your confusion will leave you. You'll be better."

Healed, he thinks. He'd like to be healed. Although, Hannibal has yet to find a way. Except now, apparently. He's going to offer him something and it'll heal him. Or heal some part of him.

Will tries to think of what that could be. What could he ever desire, what could ever heal him, that Hannibal of all people could offer him? Money? He's comfortable, far more than he ever has been. He doesn't need more–and not during such a strange encounter. He doesn't desire it and he doubts it would heal anything in him.

The beast lays its head against Hannibal's thigh. It looks up at him, dark eyes reflecting back at Will. He sees nothing there, no life, no consciousness, only his reflection staring back.

He marvels at it, the wondrous horror of it all. There is beauty, but he wouldn't expect any less from Hannibal. It doesn't cross his mind to question what the beast is, why it's here, where he drug it from. He stares at it and stares back at himself.

"Yes?" He says as the beast blinks and he can finally drag his eyes away.

"Your life." He cuts through a browned breast of meat. He can't place it, but it's covered in fragrant herbs and spices that come upon him suddenly. His mouth waters anew.

That gives him pause, his near trance breaks. Shatters. It's all glass on the floor and his feet are bare. "My life?"

He hasn't given much thought to his life. He understands the cards he's been dealt, he even accepts them. What more could there be to have? He has a good job, a nice house, and his dogs. A man like him wants, of course, but he's become stagnant in his want. It all seems to be pulled further and further from him, and it's easier now than ever to find comfort in that. Even if mold grows.

Everyone he knows, both here and back in Louisiana have fulfilled their desires. They have the lives they felt were promised to them. Jobs, children, white picket fences that scream *All American Dream*. That was never in Will's cards, even as he fights for it. God above, he is not made for The American Dream. He wants to be. He was a good Southern boy. He kissed girls. He drank beer. He works on boats. God did not design him for it, but did God have a wife? No. He is not better than God.

"If you wish to live, to have those things in which you desire, drink from my cup, and leave your role. Abandon what they've made you." He fills his golden cup with warm red

fornication and tries to place it into Will's shaky hands. His throat dries again, so desperate, so thirsty. "You will not regret this."

Abandon his role. Leave the seclusion he's built in the face of other's persecution and become something else. The investigator, the professor, the man he always was meant to become. Shed away the coat, well buttoned as it may be, and step into the light. The light Hannibal has made for him.

"No one's made me," Will argues weakly. His throat stings with the need to drink. Sweat has begun to prickle across his face. It smells good to drink; the hornet nests rattles. The sweet song of the Spirit's voice is there as well, but he can't place what it says. Everything else is too loud. "I am what I am."

Hannibal takes his cup back and drinks from it, dribbles of red liquid roll from the corners of his mouth at the gluttonous display. Will has never seen him behave in such a way, and his mind clips between the darkness and the man before him. To tries to piece him together. He's seen Hannibal outside of therapy, but this is so different. He wants to ask what's changed, but maybe he's showing him the true him.

All of this is strange to him, this test, this damnation. He is a damnable thing, his father knew it, the women of his church knew it, even the FBI knew it. They could all see, haughty as it is, that he is something worse, even if he can't and refuses to see it himself. That doesn't have to be his life, and he wonders, between the phantasmagoria of what's before him and what his mind can possibly comprehend, if Hannibal is offering him the worst of himself. The worst and everything he's ever wanted. The job, the respect, the wife, the child, the wide expanse of his soul's need.

Hannibal places thick cuts of meat on Will's ivory plate. "If you're hungry, you may eat at my table. It's all for you, Will. I prepared each piece by hand."

When Will looks, and all the food looks good to eat, he very nearly grabs for the fork. The meats are thick, covered in wine sauces or smothered in gravies. Hannibal takes a ladle of something creamy and pours it over the meat he's placed on his plate. It smells warm, like his mother's roast, or his fathers rabbit stew.

Suddenly, his mouth fills with saliva again. The dryness goes quickly and his stomach feels void, churning like it had when he was a boy stealing watermelons. That hunger gnaws, it reaches all the way back to his spine and a voice, not so easily drowned out by the Spirit–the soft voice of childhood poverty and stale bread–whispers that if he does not eat now, he'll never know what it means to be full again.

"What is it?" He asks. He doesn't know why he asks, but he does. The Spirit, he thinks, is telling him what he should say. Or the hornet nest, although, he believes it would choke him before it helped.

Hannibal tilts his head, almost amused. "What do you believe it to be?"

The hornet nest rattles harder, and his chest and stomach feels like they might collapse in. He could be sucked into the hole this collapse will create. It rattles and rattles and rattles and he

can't breathe for it. "I don't know."

"Do as Garret Jacob Hobbs did. Eat of it, if you are so good then you would honor each part." Hannibal pushes the plate a bit closer. The meat is moist and fragrant, the cream sauce is thick and speckled with spices. "You'll never hunger, you'll never know the constraints of poverty again."

Hannibal's eyes seem blacker now. The enormity of his hunger begins to crush him under its cold thumb. He doesn't just hunger for food, not the kind most eat. The flavor of his father is on his tongue. A flavor long since forgotten. Flesh and blood, *his* flesh and blood.

"If I eat your food, then I'm no better than him." He isn't better than him, but he tries. Trying, he reasons, is the most important part. It's what makes him so good at his job, he knows what it means to hunger for a Biblical punishment and not partake. "No amount of covered mirrors will save those souls."

The meat tempts him nonetheless, and it doesn't stop when the plate is pulled away from him. What could Doctor Lecter eat? A man he trusts so, sitting in the dark abyss of wood, glittering in the moonlight with his beast. Even it eats the meat, long tongue licking up the gravy and specks of herbs. This meal is good enough for Hannibal, hand prepared for Will, and he's rejected it.

Distantly, his dogs howl for him. He doesn't remember letting them out of the house, but he can't be sure he shut the door – he doesn't remember leaving his house to begin with. There was nothing and then there was wood and then there was food. Tempting and filling.

He turns his head toward the sound, eyebrows creased together. It silences the rattling in his chest, something new to focus on. Something far more tangible than anything else. His stomach drops, a peculiar hotness comes over his entire body, briefly his head splits, the viscera of his skull and brain touch the cold air and he jerks, and then is all realigns itself. He's once again whole in a matter of seconds but he cannot forget the way the cold air touched the most intimate part of him.

"It's good to eat," Hannibal insists, demanding his attention. "You'd waste meat for your own conscious. You would never hunger for anything, Will."

Will digs his nails into his hands, sipping the air like stale communion wine. His lungs expand, he can feel the air in them, each bit of tissue moving to accommodate his need. The heat seems to die down, but he still prickles with sweat, and he loses the sound of his dogs, howling for him to return home.

Soon, he tells himself. He can go home to them soon.

"Or do you desire something else?" Hannibal asks, voice softening. "Something desperate. Something you can hardly name yourself."

Will's lips parts, tongue coming to touch his bottom lip. "I don't desire anything, Doctor Lecter."

Nothing he could name. Nothing he dares name. Hannibal is right in that way, and it makes him hot with shame. He hopes he may ignore that part of him yet. That he may offer something–anything else. That he'll save him the trouble and the embarrassment.

"You could have me." He takes a healthy drink from his glass before leaning back. His body is set to display, there for Will and his pleasures. "My body could be yours. What others think of that would matter so little. You can forget it all, Will. You could come with me."

His breath hitches. Of all he's offered him–his life, to stamp out his hunger, this is the hardest to deny. This is something that has lurked at the back of his mind for weeks, as they share glasses of wine during therapy and sit so close their knees nearly slot together. It's a pit in his stomach, something that nothing–not the buzz of the hornet nest, not the voice of the Spirit, not even his well crafted mask can escape–can stamp out.

Each day he looks at Hannibal and lusts. His weakest part, what he considered his stumbling block for years. As he grew, he wondered if God had abandoned him because of his insatiable lust. This time is no different, not as his cock twitches and stomach cramps with want.

His body shakes with need, with his will to not give in. Of all the things he's craved, freedom, sustenance, sex, he has wanted one thing more than all, one thing he has yet to acknowledge within himself – Hannibal Lecter. As he sits with his beast, gluttonous, drinking the fornocation of his life, Will knows he'd like to forget. He'd like for how others view him to matter so little. All he'd have to do is take Hannibal. And it would be so easy. He could do it now. He could slip his hands under his clothes and lay him over this feast table and bury himself all the way in until they couldn't find his beginning and Hannibal's end.

He stands suddenly, hands shaking, sweat beading on his brow. The great fiend, the stumbling block, his fall, he can't let Hannibal win. He doesn't know why he's doing this to him, but he can't give in. Not today, not any day.

"You don't mean that." His mouth waters, stomach flipping. His cock so hard, throbbing, wet, and wanting in his pants. "I need–"

"I can give you everything." Hannibal looks up at him, touches his hand. His heart thunders, the hornet nest goes wild with envy. "The world can be yours. I can give you everything you've wanted. You can have your freedom, all you have to do is take me."

Life, hunger, freedom. He doesn't believe he can truly have one without the other, but Hannibal has presented it in such a way that he could. Maybe he could have life, or he could have hunger, or he could have freedom. Maybe if he was anything else, but he isn't. He is this, Holy and blasphemous and horrid. So horrid.

"I can't." His mouth tastes like copper and fruit. He doesn't recall eating dinner but he must have. It's so late now. "I like what I have."

Every man before him as stumbled and they have been forgiven. He hasn't, and he still won't be. This is a fruitless decision, but one he makes nonetheless.

He steps back, his chair falling away, and moves until he's coming away from the table, his boots catching in muck and he stumbles–the only kind of stumbling he can allow himself tonight. His entire front crashes against the ground and he rolls to his back with a grunt. The mud will cling to him, but it's not unlike a second baptism. The earth blessing him for his struggles, for denying all of his wants. He stares up in horror, not at Hannibal who looms with horns and heads or his beast that stares unblinking, but at himself. The grotesque weight of all of his desires.

Hannibal says something, his beast trills, but Will doesn't listen. He *can't*. It would kill him.

Whatever terrible thing Hannibal is, beast and all, he isn't different. He can't be, but he has to be. The hornet nest almost bursts inside of him, nearly killing him, but he swallows down the wasp spit and inspects and heaves himself up to run.

The Spirit calls, it pleads, it begs for him. He doesn't care. He can't listen. If he stays even a second longer he knows he'll fail. He isn't a strong man in that way, God did not make him stronger than the warm body of another man.

Each slip of his feet is quick and disjointed; his body crashes into trees and bushes and his ankles catch on vines. The night finally takes over, and as he breaks through the tree line, he sees his dogs. They run to him, jumping and barking. His house is complete lit, even the upstairs rooms, and his front door is open. Waiting on his return.

He stumbles up the steps, falling and hitting his ribs. All of the air rushes out of him and he's left with nothing but the hornet nest as he scrambles. Hannibal calls to him, screaming, demanding his return. His voice the the voice of the Spirit mix into one wretched thing. He slams his door shut, and the dogs scratch, and his entire body locks up.

The floor is cold.

End Notes

sorry for the lack of posts, i've been so unfortunately busy with work and have been trying to give most, if not all of my energy to ofdc. i hope to get the rest of dog teeth up by the end of next week and i have some one shots to post so long as work cools down. also EVERYONE STREAM ETHEL CAIN'S NEW SONG IMMEDIATELY!!!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!